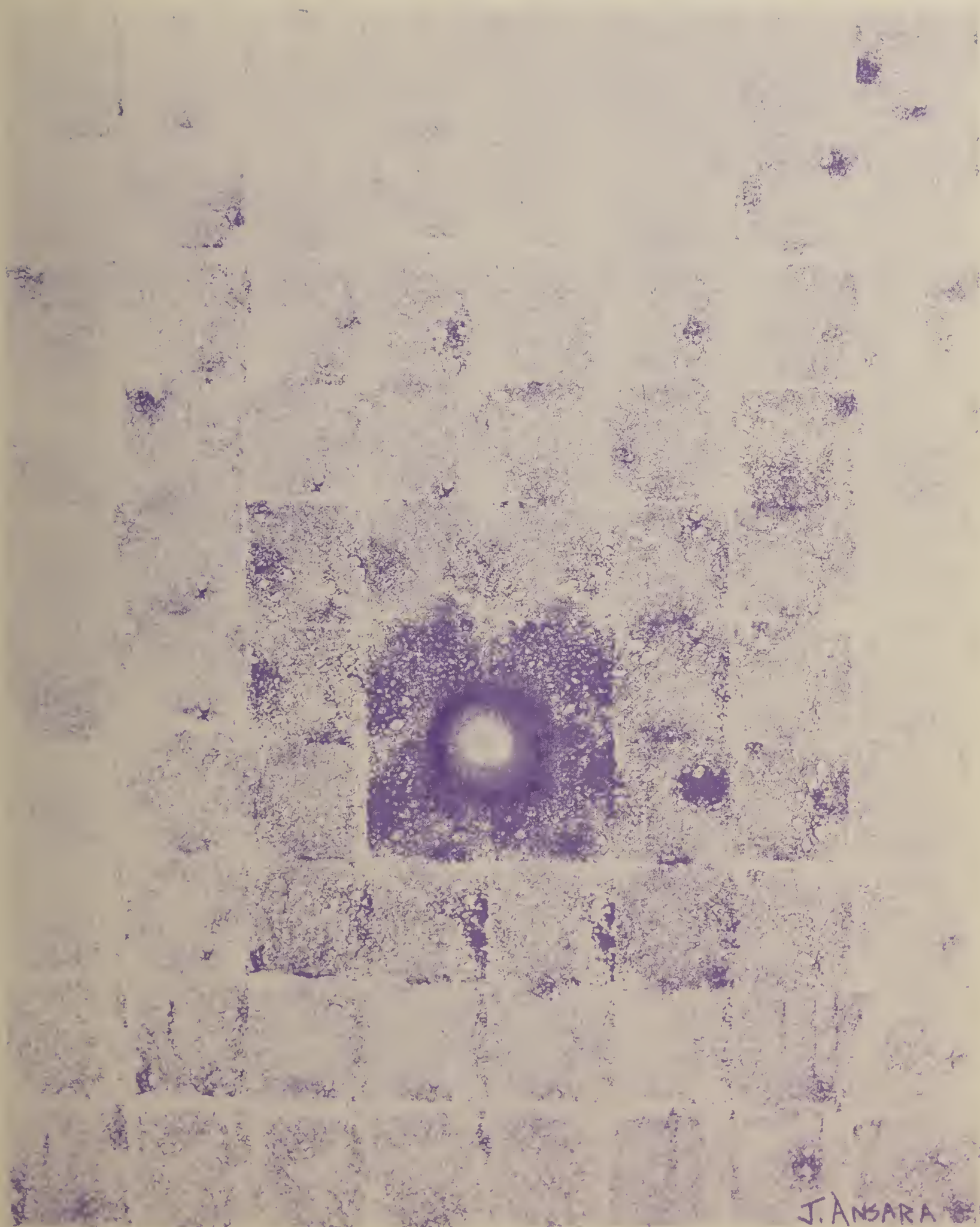


ETHOS



J. ANSARA



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Presenting

ETHOS

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Volume 44

Number 2

Kathie Babineau

Diane Roche

Nancy Harten

Nancy Brady

With A Little Help From Our Friends

Judy Ansara

Sr. Frances Mary, O.P.

Joanne Bukovich

Sr. Maryann McCourt

Paula Carrol

Marylinda Poule

Sr. Susan Thornell

Audrey McNamara

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“... based on a spectre”

all the fireflies sledged into muck
 flight
with lead-log feet
— or maybe the clouds are low
but I feel its unfeeling
like Ariel in stone.

All is stare-white
 riveted snow
shadows are bayed
and sporters in the dark
spar mistakes that leap.

they are sons to a fable-monger
with a vague eye
— inheritors of paraphrase.
lank-mouthed
they forge dry visions
and milkweed settles for clay.

all the green insights frontieraed with plows
 promises slumped
muggied like swamp-trees.
there's an echo gaunt and granite
and I feel the undoing
of Ariel to stone.

Marylinda Poule '70



Bukovich

Joanne Bukovich '71

The Kingdom

through darkened passages of night's caves
we stumbled along stunned
between dark hands
 whose fingers would try
 to choke
 the day
a clock alone detected day's disguise as false.
we scuffed around groping gently,
so soft against the dark
round and smooth plastic cup
cherished and discovered
 foreign world
 go gentle
 soft
 walk soft
dark demanded reverence-forced us blind
the dull stuttering mind clustered and cluttered
dizzy and drifting the world spins
 hang on!
quiet now, be still, the spirit has come
a brown velvet cloud adrift
the spirit of coffee floats under the door.
its tiny hands warm our noses
then pick the lock that chains us down.
phantom sweeping and seeping in the brain
 soak up the dark
 soak up the dark
 unshackle the sun
 revive life from Hibernates
the spirit of coffee rules the world
chiffon bodied coffee king —
 the clock is true.
 the clock is true.
 it is light!
 it is day!

Sister Maryann McCourt '70



Sister Susan Thornell '71

4/15

Sister Susan Thornell '71

The Daring

Kathleen Babineau '71

Half-done night hangs chilled about me, and olive trees threaten black. In the distance I watch moonlight float warped upon the wrinkled sea, and a heavy quietness pools in my heart. When had it all begun? This — this madness that in a few hours will glare, with the sun, unfilteringly real?

To escape — that was my plan. But not quite as simple as that. True, we were free to roam the island as we wished, for the King had forged stronger chains than are hammered on an anvil. Minos knew his people well — knew that no inhabitant of Crete would dare to defy the throne by aiding my son and me. So we wandered along shores and beside village houses, and I always looked away whenever Icarus exclaimed how marvelous it would be to sail away from Crete.

To escape. But how? Never a moment when that question did not gnaw at my brain. Never a time that my son's eyes would lick the horizon when my whole body did not ache to burst from that agony of helplessness. I, Daedalus, famed architect of the infamous Labyrinth held captive by a king's command! Blocked from the sea because Minos said, "They shall not leave."

But he did not rule the heavens, and somehow that nagging thought tumbled over and over in my head. The heavens where gods

walked . . . the wind . . . the sun and stars. Those he did not rule. Minos could forbid me the seas for his ships sailed upon them, but the sky belonged to those who dared.

How though? I could not just wish Icarus and myself to rise from the ground and be transported to Italy. Even birds did not do that. Birds had to . . . had to . . . Of course! Birds had to use wings — sleek, feathery wings — beautiful, beautiful wings — wings that cut the wind and made birds free. If wings could carry birds from tree to brook, could they not lift us also?

No. It was impossible. No man had ever flown. But then no man had ever created a maze from which even Theseus could not escape. No man had ever threaded the milky contours of a conch shell. No man except Daedalus. I had done the impossible before and if the skies were open to any man they were open for me. To snatch us from this limbo life. To carry Icarus and me beyond even a king's breath. To set us free.

My sketches and talk of birds enchanted Icarus. But a nine year old is often more hindrance than help.

"Why? What is this? Does it work?" He trailed after me and continually plucked my sleeve to stop my work and notice him. Often, though, he lost himself in the quiet intensity of our task.

Then he would assure me, "Father, I can do it," and carefully smooth out the parchment edges of my diagrams so that the September wind would not disturb them.

Days melted into weeks, and our small hut soon became a collage of wax, feathers, twigs and string. Every empty space filled, stuffed with those fragments of our freedom. The moist pressure of Icarus' hand on my shoulder as he supervised my work compelled me to finish quickly. For him. For the life of my son and his sons and all the dusky generations to come. For all those we would fly and be free.

Now an October sunrise washes night from the skies, and the last coat of wax is hardened. We are finished. No more planning or molding. Everything finished. Only the daring left. There is a solemnity hanging in the air this morning that whispers of our challenge. Icarus emerges sleepy-eyed from the lingering twilight of our hut.

"Now, Father? Now are we leaving?"

I hesitate just a moment. "Now, Icarus. Help me carry the wings to the ledge." There is no need to repeat all the instructions I have been giving him these last weeks. He chatters all the way, explaining to me the basic principles of flying, of gliding with the wind, of moving from the shoulders.

Finally at the top of the ledge I strap the sleek, black wings onto his back, fitting his arms into the leather loops along the underside. He seems a bit timid so I remark, "How handsome you look!" His face erupts into a cheek-splitting grin, and he carefully tests his wings while I slip into mine.

"Icarus." My voice seems unusually hushed in the growing brightness of morning. "Just follow me. Avoid going too near the waves, because the moisture will weigh down your wings. And stay away from the sun, too, for its heat will melt the wax."

"I'm ready, Father." is his quietly solemn answer.

I poise on the edge and moving the wings slowly at first and then more quickly feel the wind catch underneath and lift me gently from the stoney ground. It works! I made it work! I hover about ten feet above my son who is shouting gleefully with the wonder of it. I tilt the new-grown arms just a bit to alight softly next to him, and now both of us balance on the edge.

"My turn? Now is it my turn, Father?"

"Yes, Icarus. You know what to do. Just move strongly from your shoulders and let the wind carry you." Even as I speak his small chest begins to heave with deeper breathing, his arms move slowly, surely and I watch his

body rise quiveringly before me. The beat of my wings joins his, and the two of us lose ourselves in the dizzying exhilaration of flying. Oh, the glory of it. The heart-pounding, blood-bursting freedom of it. Wind. Sun. And four wings. To never end, but just to float and soar forever.

We wheel away from shore and head out over the sea. Icarus dips dangerously close to the waves.

"Icarus!" But his answering laugh assures me that he is only teasing a father's caution. I veer to the left a bit to investigate several fishing boats which speckle the water beneath us. My throat tightens with the cry, "Look at me! Look at me!" Free. Unleashed. At last. My son and I. As I turn back to see if he feels it too, he has moved. Changed and exceeded our plan. Too high. Oh, Icarus, you're too high. Wax melts, and you're too high.

"Icarus!" But already his slight figure is moving above the reach of my voice. I think I almost hear him laughing, but perhaps it is only the wind against my ears. I strain, rise higher — faster. Shoulders tightening. Even as the heat grows and sweat runs into my eyes, I mount but he is too far above me.

"Icarus!" He can't hear me. Can't know that I am trying to reach him. For a moment I lose him in the shimmering glare of the sun, and then my watering eyes capture him in the orange glow. So young to be so free.

One. Two. Wings dropping like the surrendering leaves of autumn's dying flowers. Funny how time is crystallizing and freezing up here in this moment of too-bright horror and too-real heat. To hold in my mind, forever, the figure of my son suspended here, poised in the air. No wings. Just waiting, it seems, for many long fiery moments. His head tilts toward the sun, and his hand seems to move to his eyes to shield them from the fire above. One moment of knowing it all.

And then the plunge. The tumbling, rushing fall into water. I don't think he ever hears me scream. His thin, pale leg cocked away from his body is the final glimpse I steal of him until he melts silently into the blueness below.

How quiet it seems. My lungs almost bursting from the chase, but I abandon myself to the wind and glide for nine eternities. And now the thin etching of a shoreline below me pulls me down. Down to hardness and trees. Down to the warm smell of land and leaves. Isn't the same, though. Isn't ever the same hearing the sparrows and feeling sun-baked rocks. They are all too solid, too firm. And for now I can only remember water. Water, and the way a small boy's leg can look against forever blueness.

Eden's Driveway

Children feet
ouch out over
the salt and pepper mosaic sea.
Spilling
 from
 the red brick ark
for sleeveless reasons
they polka dot
the gravel swells
biggest — Hurry! and
littlest — Help!
(Smiles would wear sandals)
but
winces have wings
to make fast away
with nine feet of pain
with agony: just-a-cut
on the other side, the neighbor's yard
with plastic well
and automatic tide.

Nancy Harten '71

WHAT THE

BALLOON

SAID

The serene battle for the ceiling
fills the room just as water fills my rubber skeleton.
The room desperately tries to grow a door
but the battle breathes
and I control with a wooden glove all births in this room.
The contemplative battle for the walls
retreats in the face of thirst.
Wooden gloves crawl raw and splintered
toward the battle's throat
thirsting to create death.
Death is my soft face
painted with a bright red myth
carved and molded.

Nancy Brady '71



Audrey McNamara

The Diary

Sr. Frances Mary, O.P. '72
8 March 1719

At the present time, being responsible as it were, for the welfare of his Royal Majesty's Colony of Louistown during the absence of its Rightful Governor, the Honorable Captain Jonathan Mills, I have resolved to commit to paper the more notable occurrences in the said Colony, as well as my own apprehensions and musings about them.

It is at date, nearly a fortnight since Captain Mill's departure. As yet no reports come from or about him, and I must confess to a slight inquietude in the matter. I own I ought have no such worry: the work on the new Fortress progresses steadily; our good townsmen actively prepare for planting; indeed the entire village seems to have contracted a feverish spirit of activity — premonitory, perhaps, of Spring. And yet, strange rumours, though always extremely vague (exists there anything so inconsistent as idle gossip?) begin to circulate among the population. This talk, methinks, foreshadows no pleasant results. The heavens themselves further heighten the mood: dressed in a more sober grey, for several days they have glowered darkly over us, ominous and threatening, so that oftentimes apprehension has invaded my soul at the sight. It senses a danger it is unable to logically comprehend . . .

9 March 1719

Daybreak proved misty and cold. A light wind caused the branches to chatter like old men's teeth. All of nature seemed curiously hushed and the silence lay as a shroud over the entire countryside. No birds sang from the trees.

The greater part of my morning was spent in the company of Samuel Caldwell, a worthy farmer of the village. The threatening skies have rendered Sam fearful insofar as planting and, in his dilemma, he desired to consult me. I avow that my help was naught, for, in truth, my knowledge of crops and planting and

plowing, of all things agricultural, is slight indeed. I could not but observe the untr tranquil expression in Samuel's eyes as he spoke, and I deduced, (for I have known Sam since he was but a stripling) that some other consideration plagued him.

"Sam," said I jovially, "for some time now you have been fidgeting on the edge of that chair. Out with it, man! What is troubling you?"

"Justice Elkanah," said he, "you must have your manner!" He laughed forthright, which relieved my mind, although I remember thinking his laughter perhaps a trifle too hearty. He played with the edge of his rough coat sleeve, picking bits of dust off it. His eyes would not meet mine. I admit that my spirit was confused, for, long as my acquaintance with Samuel had been, never once could I recall his having behaved in this manner.

"Elkanah," said he, and paused once more. His index finger absently rubbed his woolen cuff. "Elkanah, have you any knowledge of the tales Tom has been spreading?"

"Tom?" said I stupidly.

"It is as I thought. The whole village is afire with 'em, you as yet ignore them! — though surely you above all ought to know."

It was suddenly very still; an awkward hush filled the sitting-room. Only the whine of the wind, whistling through the larger chinks in the wall, swelled and subsided and swelled again. The very gloom seemed to darken a shade. Clouds? An unreasoning fear seized me and I shuddered. Sam yet fixedly gazed at the rough top of the table between us, without appearing to see it, his finger stroking his sleeve back and forth. Despite my growing uneasiness I could not bring myself to speak. The mantle-clock chimed half past ten, and its vibrations strangely echoed through the stillness till they seemed to have penetrated the very essence of it.

At length Samuel roused himself as though with great effort, but without raising his eyes. He quietly laughed and shook his head — embarrassed, I thought.

"Tom affirms that Nell Samson is a witch, Elkanah. Think on it! He claims that she has a switch in her cabin upon which she is able to ride. He believes she can transform herself into the old tabby which often sits near her hearth — the cat's eyes oftentimes appear strange and knowing, and Tom says he has heard it speak twice or thrice. And one time, as old Nell was walking past our cabin, Tom's dog began to yelp in such a fashion! and ran off tail between its legs to hide till she was past. Tom claims to have observed Nell many times flying about when the moon was full or riding 'Squire Jackson's black mare. Elkanah — " Sam looked full at me as he uttered the words — "Elkanah, 'Squire Jackson wonders why his mare is at times sweat-covered in the morning." Sam paused but his eyes remained fixed on mine. "Elkanah — Tom's dog died this morning."

I shivered and pressed into the back of my chair. Sam's gaze had dropped to the table-top and his finger had resumed its play . . .

10 March 1719

My sleep, agitated and fitful, refreshed me not a whit. I awoke startled: a mighty thunder-clap still echoed along the hills. Raindrops like heavy iron nails drove into my roof. The countryside hid behind gloom, grey water and mud. The shrill voice of the wind howled furiously over it all. My first thought was not of Nell but that the men would undoubtedly declare it impossible to work on the new Fortress this forenoon. This Edifice, the pride and joy of all Louistown, ought to be completed by harvest-time, if one gives credence to popular opinion, and will, thanks to its ideal location on a lofty bluff overlooking the entire Valley, assure a welcome protection from our every foe. The townsmen labor diligently over it, taking pride in the work of their hands, and my amazement is in no way slight as I behold the progress they make.

But — come! — I am dallying, trying to push out of my consideration the rumours about old Nell. As I must needs reflect upon them in any matter, being responsible for the people of this Colony till the time of Captain Mills' return, I have resolved to ponder the subject with pen and ink. This method, I have found, habitually has the advantage of clarifying and organizing my reasoning. Perhaps some mode of action will suggest itself.

Therefore, what of Nell? Quite early in the afternoon 'Squire Jackson called, visibly struggling with his emotions: indeed, his short compact person seemed to quiver under their

force. The latest rumour burst from him: Nell had been seen, grown twice her size, wrapped in a flowing black cape, standing atop a knoll. Her uplifted arms implored the skies to pour forth their wrath, and her shrill speech, mixed with wild cackling sounds and low moans, was dreadful to hear. The 'Squire appeared plainly terrified. To be sure, he is a strongly emotional man, yet willingly do I admit my confusion — nay, my fear.

Reason dictates that at times, certain considerations rightly force the honest man to accept a policy of compromise. The arguments in the present case press equally well from either side. Nell Samson may be little else than a simple-minded old woman, reduced by infirmity and dotage into a strange delirious creature. Or again, endeavoring to understand the accusations that townsfolk fling in Nell's face, one can say that witchcraft, although more uncommon than some would have us believe, plausibly exists even in our own enlightened era. It is one of my fondest theories that, in spite of the many delusions and impostures, witches, seers, divines and the like are not always people of feeble understanding or crazed imagination. I need agree with Good Shakespeare's line: There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

But the present dilemma remains. What to do? Ought I interfere? The village people, filled with extravagant fancies, and frightful dreams shrink before the old woman in terror. The storm greatly aids their general agitation. Day wears a cold unfriendly face, and the harsh rain beats down. 'Squire Jackson who, among the villagers, owns the greatest amount of land, fears for his fields and home. Should the River overflow . . .

15 March 1719

Still the rains fall.

It is several nights since last I set pen to paper. The days elapsed, far from assuaging the villagers' fears, merely heightened them, twisting them out of all sane proportion. The river, swelled and menacing, roars by, dark and powerful, threatening to bury all things along her path. Indeed, at this very instant, the troubled waters seep through floors and dampen walls. All manner of animals seek shelter upon higher ground, and enormous rats, nearly a foot in length, are not uncommonly seen both without and within the cabins. And the storm continues yet.

I might here mention the formidable pressure which all of this has laid upon the hearts and minds of our townspeople. The imminent danger of Floods fills each breast with brood-

ing apprehension. The men, tense and deeply worried, bitterly taste their helplessness. Their useless anger spends itself in stormy outbursts, or in sullen taciturnity which does not relieve but only further irritates. Their wives, perhaps sensing the peril more acutely, as women are bound to do, fret in a confused manner about children, husband, home, and their distress is by no means slight.

Samuel Caldwell, considering that the River soon must overflow its banks, is of the opinion that the villagers ought immediately repair to the finished halls of the Fortress, there to await the eventual abatement of the waters. I warrant the plan appears sound. And yet, must all the earthly possessions of these people be left here in the Valley at the mercy of the elements? Would there not be profit in waiting? in undertaking the construction of a levee? The rains cannot last to all eternity! Ah, would that Captain Mills gave sign of life! . . . Soon, then, would the dilemma be solved!

19 March 1719

During the greater part of two hours this afternoon the rain ceased. The brief intermission strange and oppressive and as threatening in its own way as the storm itself, brought no lasting truce: the harsh grey rain soon began to fall once more with refreshed and cruel vigor. Under these circumstances the men have decided to begin the construction of a dike. The rumours about Nell Samson slowly recede before the more pressing problem of floods. Since Tuesday last I have heard nary a word of the matter. For my own part I can but heartily wish to see this dangerous speculation entirely fade. And yet I fear this silence is other than simple indifference. It betokens, methinks, a terror which has taken firm root and begun its slow, unhealthy growth. The tales of Nell are buried deep in the fear-ridden hearts of the people, and I distrust the apparent calm: eruptions are oft-times more terrible and destructive than floods.

20 March 1719

Tossing fretfully or lying still on my couch, I pondered the whisperings about old Nell throughout the night, although to no avail. Morning dawned peevish still, but the rain pattered more softly, as though, assured of achieving its destructive goal, it no longer considered violence essential. Deeply engrossed in my own thoughts, I gazed through the window, completely abandoning my fev-

erish brain to fancies of a stranger hue. Nell! how the entire matter plagued me! Legends waxed thick around her, fear and suspicion followed in her steps. To refrain from all action served only to maintain the cankerous, festering wound. Yet, what ought I do? Perhaps — to see Nell, to observe her with my very eyes? — 'twould reassure! Yet I fear should it rather confirm the secret doubt lurking at my heart: that elements here combine in a manner other than natural. Fearsome thought! The matter is grave; I cannot but seriously consider it.

21 March 1719

Unable to contain the supernumerary horrors battering my mind and slyly invading my dreams, this morning I decided: at all costs, I must know! that very day would I see Nell, and hopefully counter (perhaps confirm! aye, there's the problem! . . .) all of these insane imaginings about her.

Quickly then I saddled the roan and set out along the forest path. The steed made slow progress. Mud and slime oozed between his hooves, raindrops gleamed along his neck. Soon enough, arriving upon Nell's hovel, I spied the old wife herself beside it, bent near to the turf, picking whatever sticks she was able to find. Coarse rags of various hues and sizes enwrapped her, the remains of what appeared to have once been a thin woolen kerchief lay about her crooked shoulders. Her entire frame trembled in the rain. She had not marked my arrival (possibly deaf, I thought) and no more marked my approach. As I drew closer the sound of her strange, continuous mumbling reached me. Apprehension made me wary. I could distinguish no words, although the guttural mutterings, as indeed their very brevity, recalled to my mind the dialect spoken by a few of the more peaceful Indian tribes beyond the Great River.

"Good morrow, good dame!" said I heartily.

Nell raised her head with a quick, birdlike jerk, the rapidity of which, I must avow, quite astonished me. She uttered not a sound, though all the while her lips moved as though forming silent words. Her visage, lined and chapped, continually twitched. Her light eyes bulged slightly from their sockets, bleary and rimmed with redness. In surprise or in fear she had jerked one withered hand to her mouth while the other drew the kerchief closer.

"Well, Nell, how goes it with you?" said I, handing her a package of sugar and dried raisins. Upon my words, her face grew in a twinkling pale, although her watery gaze remained fixed. Then, with another quick jerk,

she proffered such a strange stream of gibberish nonsense that, I need admit, I felt the cold fingers of fear clamp down upon my heart. The stream ended as sudden as it had begun, on what appeared to be mid-way through a word, if indeed the strange sounds could thus be termed! Mute, as though in a stupor, I gazed upon her, only partly seeing the tiny raindrops sparkling over her flushed face. Then of a sudden she smiled, a poor empty smile — pitiful creature! and darted toward her hut. The door closed harshly upon her and stillness once again descended upon the clearing.

I slowly returned to the settlement, giving the roan his head. The rain gently tapped the earth and dead leaves, quietly, peacefully, as though mocking the strange fancies of my overwrought brain . . .

Upon reaching my cabin, I found Samuel, upset and excited, striding the length and breadth of the small sitting-room.

"Elkanah! where in heaven's name have you been?" Sam's bloodless face contrasted the frenzy in his eyes; indeed, his entire person resembled that of a man preyed upon by some great anguish.

"Calm yourself, Samuel!" said I. "You shan't express . . ."

He did not let me finish. "Elkanah! Tom has fallen into a fever — a fever the likes of which I have never heard of much less seen before! It has raged over him all during the night while Polly and I kept watch, hoping it might break. He is weaker now and we fear — Elkanah — " His voice dropped. "Tom is all he have — "

I bade him take a chair and sat facing him. "Sam," said I after a few moments, "I have some slight knowledge of these things, having treated many cases of fever in my day. I should like to see Tom."

The lad, shivering and delirious, uttered a low moan as Sam unlatched the door. Polly sat by her son, haggard, smoothing his pillow, tucking in the coverlet.

"Sam!" said she, her voice weary and rough for lack of sleep, "why have you delayed so long?" Sam, glancing distractedly at the small figure on the couch, mumbled something in response. As I stood there near him, suddenly, without warning, a sharp premonition gripped my soul. My examination confirmed the fear: this strange fever was like no other malady I had ever witnessed on any countenance, and God only knew the number of strange fevers I had treated in the marshland country. An ugly red rash covered the boy's body, he twisted violently, shivered and at times, suddenly lay still, his unseeing eyes fixed straight.

"Elkanah," Sam murmured, looking at me, "can you help him?"

I slowly shook my head. "Sam," said I, "this fever, I warrant, bewilders me. Tom needs a doctor, but the nearest one is two days' ride from here."

The room grew still; the last words I had spoken hung in the air, an invisible menace. Only Polly's quiet sobbing was to be heard, and the patter of the rain on the roof. Tom's slender frame lay rigid beneath the quilt.

As though shaking himself from a deep trance, Samuel took my arm and led me into the sitting-room, carefully closing the door behind us.

"Elkanah," said he softly, "Polly thinks Tom's illness due to Nell . . ." Sam kept his eyes lowered, and he spoke hurriedly, as though on impulse, words that I knew should not have been uttered had he paused to reflect . . .

22 March 1719

Tom has made no improvement. Mistrust and suspicion grow among the people. Parts of the dike have given away. The waters, dangerously high, threaten to cover the Valley. All hands are needed to repair the damage. Delay is inadmissible; lives hang in the balance.

23 March 1719

Widow White's son Jamie, Tom Caldwell's good friend, has fallen into the throes of the same inexplicable fever. The town seethes with unrest; the foreboding danger penetrates everywhere. This very morning did I find a bit of paper tacked to my door. It read: "Nell Samson, the witch, must be destroyed, elsewise, all of Louistown will perish." There was no signature. The dispatches to Captain Mills have returned: the messenger was unable to cross the swollen river at any point. Sam and Polly, beside themselves with worry, care for Tom as best they can, but the boy's condition improves not. The villagers grudgingly understand Sam's absence during the levee-mending, yet their whispers about Tom's fever grow steadily bolder and more terrifying.

Although I deeply partake of the common concern, my fears of eventual violence verily drown out all other matters . . .

25 March 1719

To what length of time can all this endure? Six families have at present date been quartered in the left wing of the Fortress, and shortly will others join them there. The tension can scarce become greater. Throughout

the village the name of Nell is whispered: a bitter and hateful invocation. My own words of reason, irritably brushed aside, clearly prove the uselessness of logic against the tormenting, passionate fear which has seized the entire village as one man, and refuses yet to give it any respite.

27 March 1719

The blow has fallen. I was unable to forestall it.

Late in the night of the 26th of March, a party of men, over-wrought and terrified, marched together to Nell's hut. They carried great heavy clubs, some were provided with knives and hatchets, 'Squire Jackson bore his blunderbuss upon his shoulder. Their lanterns gleamed in the wet darkness, and seeing their glow, I ran from my cabin and went forth to meet the men, feigning curiosity as to their purpose, although my terrified brain understood it only too well. It raced and formulated a thousand improbable plans: deter them! yet, how? I found myself betwixt Samuel and Nicholas Grady, the blacksmith. Turning toward Sam, I inquired as to the purpose of this night-time adventure.

Sam turned glazed eyes upon me. "Elkanah, you oughtn't be here," said he roughly. A stronger determination crept into his voice. "This deed must be done or we shall all of us perish." He turned his head and rapidly strode from me.

"Sam," called I, aghast. "Sam! listen to me!" I desperately tried to catch up to him, to hold him back, to scream reason at him. "It must not happen! Stop this instant! Stop! All of you!" My voice rang and seemed to echo within my own ears.

The men halted as they heard me, and the crackling sound of last Fall's leaves beneath their feet ceased too. All was suddenly too still. In horror I stared at the faces before me: men I knew and trusted, how strange and unfamiliar they seemed! the dim glare of the lanterns revealed hardened faces, narrowed, dangerous eyes. Crazed! the word burst into my excited brain and seemed to echo there a thousand times. Terror, the intensity of which I had never before experienced, broke over me. I swayed and should have fallen, had I not been able to steady myself against a sapling at my side.

"Listen to me!" my voice sounded not louder than a whisper. "Listen! you must not do this thing! Nell is no sorceress. The old woman could have had no hand in the rain-fall . . ."

"Elkanah Stuart!" 'Squire Jackson's shrill voice screamed in reply. "I saw her work the curse! And what say you to Tom's and Jamie White's delirium? I hold —" he looked at the sea of white faces before him as a madman — "I say she must be destroyed!"

A great murmur engulfed his words. It swelled in volume till soon it had drowned out all else, mounting still, the wild cry of a beast athirst for blood echoing through the dark quiet of the night.

I looked about in horrified fascination. The rocking lanterns illumined desperate, violent faces. "God . . . for God's sake, do not do this thing . . ." My voice trembled and remained low. A sharp cry pierced the furious mumbling.

"Elkanah Stuart! Stand away! Jonathan Mills would approve our action! His is the sole responsibility for the safety of Louistown! He would not hesitate to condemn Nell on the strength of the evidence! Do not bar our way! You have no authority here!"

I shrank back, overwhelmed, into a human form directly behind me. As though bit by a snake I recoiled, whirling to see who stood there. The glow of the lanterns distorted the features of Jacob Miller, but bathed in shining light the white rope he bore on his shoulder. Beside myself with terror I stumbled forward and knew no more . . .

A long time later I awakened, muddy and bruised, a muted pain throbbing through my right ankle. Clutching the branches of a nearby bush, I painfully pulled myself up, attempting all the while to stand upon my injured foot, to walk. Darkness yet brooded over all things as I limped slowly along the path, conscious of nothing save the dull pain and the imperative desire to know, beyond all doubt. Great stretches of mud hindered my progress and many times cast me to the ground. Sharp twigs stung across my face. I marked it not. Dazed and weary, my tortured mind managed only to repeat the words "Must know, must know, must know . . ." and my feet struggled to keep time as I stumbled along.

The stale odor of smoke, at first gentle, grew steadily stronger as I neared the clearing. Nell's hovel . . . savagely hacked and smouldering yet, great puffs of black smoke against the dark sky . . . Wet planks — how could they have burned! . . . A few stars shivered between the cloud wisps. The storm was blowing over. An owl hooted from some tree. Exhausted, empty, I sank to the ground, sobbing wildly, as a child, uncontrollably in the darkness, over the shame and futility of it, over my own great guilt.

A Question of Semantics

Words
 tumbling
 in My mind
 A confused puzzle Of connotations.
Trying to solve it
 To make the brass gold
 the silent noise
 the dead life
 To make the neatly
 words
 into phrases
 and
 sentences
Which will breathe.
But words
 uncontrolled
 die
 in grabbing hands
 of
 small
 talk
 and the
 dangling
 conversation.
My stilted
 tripping
 words
 falter thus in your mind.

Paula Carroll '72

